DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 146 639 CS 501 875

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TITLE Practical Development of a High School Technical Theatre Course.
PUB DATE Dec 77
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (63rd, Washington, D.C., December 1-4, 1977) Some pages of the original appendix were deleted because of poor reproducibility

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Course Content; Curriculum Guides; Dramatics; Evaluation; *Production Techniques; Reading Materials; Senior High Schools; Teaching Methods; *Theater Arts

ABSTRACT

This document presents a week-by-week syllabus for an 18-week high school technical theatre course. This course, which may be expanded to one year or reduced to nine weeks, emphasizes having the student learn by doing, so that the teacher eventually becomes freer to concentrate on play-directing responsibilities. The document also discusses the rationale for the course, and it lists course objectives, grading suggestions, recommended textbooks, ideas for obtaining supplies for the course, and general suggestions for conducting the course. (GW)

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PRACTICAL DEVELOPMENT OF A HIGH SCHOOL TECHNICAL THEATRE COURSE

(a one-semester program)

for

SPEECH COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION,
Washington, D. C.

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A HIGH SCHOOL TECHNICAL THEATRE COURSE

I. COURSE RATIONALE

This course is structured as a one semester, one-half credit class. It is presented in such a manner that it can easily be expanded into a full year one-credit course. And just as easily, it can be reduced into a nine-week quarter course to accommodate the mini-course curriculum model that is popular in many schools.

One major feature of this course is its' design to adapt to small school programs and limited faculty. It is especially intended to aid the 'one-person' drama faculty who does everything.

This course will provide the training for students to learn how to operate, care for, and set up lights for a school play. Students will learn enough about the basics of make-up, costuming, and stagecraft to do this for school play productions. Not only will students learn these things, but by their being able to do them, the teacher will be freer to concentrate on the directing responsibilities for a school play.

If the course is used as a 'requirement' to be named as a chairman of a stagecrew, stagemanager, or lightboard operator, it will have 'peer status' with the students in your program. It provides the authority for senior students to prepare the younger students to take their places as they graduate from your program.

School administrators see such a program as "safe, practical, cost saving, and curriculum based." Because it teaches responsibility, and involves large numbers of students, especially the vocational and career oriented students, principals will look favorably upon it. It also demonstrates your professionalism and dedication as a professional teacher, giving you perfect opportunity for creating 'positive public relations'with the community and voting taxpayers.

Lastly, it is a course where the students learn by doing, and this appears to be the popular way to learn. There is enough reporting, group interaction, and researching put into this course that it could easily be justified as a part of any English program.

II. COURSE OBJECTIVES

A. Creative Expression will be experienced via many project opportunities.

B. The learning of self-discipline will become a classroom reality by doing technical stage work responsibilities.

C. Human emotions will be studied from a different perspective in terms of visual expression.

D. Group interaction will become a necessary reality to achieve production goals and deadlines.

E. Verbal communication will improve through the opportunites used to present design ideas and concepts.

F. Written communication skills will improve through the execution of research reports and design rationale.

G. By learning technical skills and stagecraft information the students' behavior will modify, and the student will know:

1. the basic uses of the school's theatre facility;
2. the operation of the school's lighting and sound equipment;
3. how to hang,focus,shutter and gel light instruments;
4. how to build, cover, and paint stage flats;
5. how to safely use all hand and power tools in a sceneshop;
6. how to rig and move flying scenery;
7. how to build, assemble, and disassemble stage platforms;
8. how to layout a floor plan, a basic light plot, and a simple watercolor perspective rendering;
9. how to clean, cable, and program light instruments into a houseboard;
10. how to change lamps in the basic stage lighting instruments;
11. how to move and care for stage drapery;
12. how to design a basic costume for a male or female actor;
13. how to apply basic stage make-up;
14. some basic costume history

III. COURSE SYLLABUS (18 week semester)

A. Week One:

1. Orientation and introduction to technical theatre
2. Tour of schools' theatre facility (no matter how meager, create a 'theatre environment')
3. Safety rules and working in a 'sceneshop'(even if your classroom is shop and your tools consist of one small box)
4. Use of basic tools: (hand and power tools/visit woodshop)
5. Types & sizes of lumber and wood/basic stagehardware

Optional: Take a field trip to a local theatre, lumberyard, or hardware company.

B. Week Two:

1. Basic electricity and safety rules
2. Lesson on operation of the school's light board (even if it consists of a circuit breaker box in the wall of gym)

3. The Ellipsoidal (leko): parts & functions
4. The Fresnel: parts & functions
5. Focusing and gelling lighting instruments

Optional: Take a fieldtrip to another high school's production and after the performance go backstage and look at their lighting instruments.

C. Week Three:

1. Cabeling & Programming light instruments into lightboard
2. Principles of stage lighting: designing a plot
3. Professional lighting plots: Current one from Theatrecraft or Lighting Dimension
4. Class lab: designing a light plot under supervision
5. Presentation of light plots to classmates

Optional: Assign a TV special for homework, and discuss the lighting used for special effects.

D. Week Four:

1. Plan lighting for the first school play
2. Class as a group design it or individuals design plots with the class selecting the 'best plot'
3. Lab: Go to the stage and discuss executing the plot
4. Discuss the play script and its lighting demands
5. Plan the light cues as they should occur on words of dialog or within certain action on the stage.

Optional: Visit a nearby college to see a play and look at their lighting facilities; ask for a tour guide to generate discussion and questions/answers.

E. Week Five:

1. Introduction to set design: Elements of Design
2. Types of scenery/ Olsen Color Film Strips, 1535 Ivar Ave., Hollywood, Calif. 90028 (excellent 8 part series)
3. Script interpretation & designing the set:basic requirements
4. History of set design: great designers & their contributations
5. Design problems and your theatre facility

Optional: Visit a nearby dinner theatre and study its limited facilities and careful use of space.

F. Week Six:

1. Drafting a design and the use of scale
2. Drafting tools/sample draftings (nlist an experienced student or ask the drafting teacher in as a guest speaker)
3. The basic flat: parts and purposes
4. The basic platform: parts and purposes
5. Lab: draw elevations of a platform and flat/compare drawings

Optional: Have class tear apart old flats and rebuild inventory.

G. Week Seven:

1. Select school play & discuss its' design problems and basic requirements
2. Lab: work on drafting a floorplan of selected play
3. Lab: work on drafting with teacher offering constructive criticism
4. Classmates present floorplan designs to each other
5. Classmates present floorplan designs to each other;discuss which one will work the best in your theatre

Optional: Invite in a college design major to speak to class about modern trends in stage designing.

H. Week Eight:

1. Drawing perspective rendering
2. Lab: designing the perspective rendering in class
3. Lab: designing the perspective rendering under teacher supervision and criticism
4. Coloring the rendering: water colors/inks/chalks
5. Presentation of classmates' renderings

Optional: Show colored pictures or slides of past school plays to demonstrate how designs and colors have and have not worked in your theatre.

I. Week Nine:

1. Introduction to scene painting (Olsen filmstrip series)
2. The color wheel and paint mixing
3. The tools of paint mixing and scene painting
4. Color psychology and set design:complimentary,analogous, and monochromatic
5. Scene painting techniques: types of texturing

Optional: Visit a large paint store and have the owner talk about mixing colors and the reasons for color choice.

J. Week Ten:

1. Paint elevations: methods and functions
2. Lab: each student make a color wheel with water colors
3. Lab: each student do a paint elevation for one flat
4. Lab: each student paint a flat using the elevation as a guide (If flats are not available get free appliance boxes and cut them up into flats; have students bring in left-over paints from home to practice with in class labs.
5. Have class set up a scene painting exhibit in library or media center for the rest of the school to view

Optional: Take a tour of a local art museum to study color and perspective.

K. Week Eleven:

1. Costume History: Egyptians,Greeeks, Romans
2. Costume History: Romanesque, Early & Late Gothic

3. Costume History: Itailian, German, French Renaissance
4. Costume History: English Renaissance (Elizabethan)
5. Costume History: 17th Century: Carolinian & Restoration

Optional: Take a fieldtrip to a local costume rental company and look at wardrobe from the various periods.

L. Week Twelve:

1. Costume History: 18th Century
2. Costume History: 19th & 20th Centuries
3. Read a historical play & discuss the costume requirements
4. Research day: look for historical data in library
5. Discuss pattern making and fabric selection/invite in the home economics teacher as a guest speaker

Optional: Take a fieldtrip to a local fabric store or ask students to make a fabric swatchbook of various materials they can find at home.

M. Week Thirteen:

1. Drafting a costume plate(provide class with male/female forms on ditto paper on which to design costumes)
2. Watercolor rendering techniques for costume plates
3. Lab: design a male period costume in class
4. Lab: design a female period costume plate in class
5. Classmates present plates to class with discussion

Optional: Have the class put a period costume plate exhibit together and display it in the library or some other place for the student body to view(Good way to advertise your course)

N. Week Fourteen:

1. Introduction to stage make-up (Olsen film strips)
2. Study of the human face: Use of light and shadow
3. Straight stage make-up (demonstration/lecture)
4. Old-age make-up (demonstration/lecture)
5. Class create a group 'morgue-file' for your theatre department (select faces of people from magazine pictures)

Optional:Assign a TV special and have the students study the the actor's make-up and discuss it in class.

O. Week Fifteen:

1. Lab: divide class into diads and do straight make-up on a friend/ go to stage and look at finished product under lights
2. Repeat activity but have partners change roles
3. Lab: have each student make-up self with old age style
4. Lab: Have students design make-up for a famous person from history.(include hats and jewelry)
5. Lab: execute the famous person design on self or classmate

Optional: Get a polaroid camera and take pictures of the finished make-up designs and show them on an opque projector for class discussion/Create a picture exhibit display.

P. Week Sixteen:

1. Introduce a final combined stagecraft project to class:
   ex. set design, floor plan, light plot
   ex. costume and make-up design
   ex. floor plan and scale cardboard model
2. Discuss how to build a cardboard model in scale
3. Introduction to sound: purpose in theatre
4. Use of special effect sounds on stage
5. Script analysis and planning sound cues

Optional: Have the class make a tape of strange sound effects that can be used on stage. Possibly select to make a sound tape for a school play.

Q. Week Seventeen:

1. Layout and planning a technical play production
2. Chain of command and operational responsibilities
3. Duties of: stage manager; lightboard operator; props, make-up; stagecrew; costumes; publicity; promotion; tickets (teach the set-up structure which works best in your local facility and community)
4. Present a brief history of technical theatre (Olsen filmstrips)
5. Design a production crew and time schedule for a school play, (use your upcoming play to be produced)

Optional: Collect play bills, programs, tickets from other theatre productions in the area and study and discuss their similarities and differences.

R. Week Eighteen:

1. Final project presentations to classmates
2. " " " " "
3. " " " " "
4. Exam: optional ex. essay on how to improve your school's technical theatre program
5. Discussion of professional theatre as it relates to the various technical areas. (Use a career approach to discussion)

Optional: Set up a technical theatre art exhibit in school lobby or media center of the final projects.

IV. COURSE GRADING SUGGESTIONS

A. Keep tests to a minimum
B. Use projects and project presentations for grading purposes
C. Presentations can be treated as speech grades or as essay research grades
D. Have students do self-evaluations and peer-evaluations
E. Lab activities can be used as graded work

V. COURSE TEXTBOOK COMMENTS

A. Rather than asking the school to purchase a text since there are no good ones for high school school students, try to build a class set of books or class library.

B. I would recommend three or four copies of the following books:

1. Scene Design and Stage Lighting, Parker and Smith
2. Theatrical Set Design: The Basic Techniques, Dave Welker
3. Stage Scenery: Its Construction and Rigging, Gillette
4. Designing and Painting for the Theatre, Lynn Pecktal
5. The Theatre Student: Scenery, Stell
6. Stage Make-up, Buchman or Stage Make-up, Corson
7. 20,000 Years of Fashion, Boucher or History of Costume, Barton
8. Costume History, Davenport

C. Since the students would not have a textbook, it would be worth while to have them keep a Stagecraft Notebook for class notes, projects, sketches, and handout sheets.

VI. COURSE SUPPLIES

A. If school budget is thin:.....

1. use proceeds from plays
2. plan activities/ex. concession stand at school events
3. props auction at end of school year
4. have class form into drama club to raise money

B. Use local industry and business as a source.....

1. scrap lumber from building sites
2. old or left over paint from sales; donated left-over paint from student's parents
3. get left-over frabic; run a'frabic drive'
4. get make-up at liquidation sales
5. get cardboard boxes, tubes, from appliance and flooring stores
6. window displays from department stores

C. Community Events.....

1. re-construction sites for doors, jams, railings, windows
2. left-overs from parades, charity balls, pageants
3. sales, junk stores, lumberyards, bus, train, truck depots

VII. COURSE SUGGESTIONS

A. Stress safety at all times in the class as well as on stage.

B. Try to have a store or work room near your class room.

C. Try to schedule the technical course last period in the day in order to extend the class technical work over into the extra-curricular activities of putting school play together.

D. Try to have running water, paper towels and a first-aid kit in the classroom where you teach the course.

E. Try to have a broom, mop, and mop bucket to prevent "spill" accidents from taking up too much valuable classtime.

F. Try to get a classroom that has good overhead lighting, windows with shades, and blackboards with wide chalk ledges that can hold up mirrors.

G. Try to have extra bookshelves and/or cupboards for class projects storage.

I. Old footlockers or pegs on the walls come in handy for clothing since most students will want to change into 'grundies' on lab class days.

J. A locked wooden tool chest on roller wheels is great because it can move back and forth between classroom and stage provided it fits through a standard doorway.

K. By firelaw, all paints should be stored in an old metal footlocker or gym locker.

L. A locked store room for make-up, electrical supplies, paints, props, mirrors, lamps, and sound equipment is a good way to keep from 'repeat' buying of these items.

VIII. COURSE APPENDIX

On the following pages are a few of the handout sheets that could be used for this suggested course. They are provided to give some ideas and suggestions for presenting technical theatre to high school age students.

(Eliminated because of poor reproducibility.)